

CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Call for Evidence – Local Centres

Councillor Ian Cruise, Chair of the Birmingham Economy & Jobs Overview and Scrutiny Committee at Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham is the second largest city in the UK and the economic centre of the West Midlands. The Birmingham Economy and Jobs Overview & Scrutiny Committee's job is to ensure that Birmingham City Council and other agencies are working together towards Birmingham having a thriving and sustainable economy.

The Scrutiny Committee, which I lead, is made up of 10 local Councillors from all the political parties in the City Council. We have identified some key priorities that will be the focus of our work this year.

Having looked at skills issues in the city, we are now turning our attention to our local centres. The city centre is often the focus of attention on economic growth and employment, and rightly so as it is an important driver of growth.

However, the Birmingham Economy & Jobs O&S Committee want to explore:

What needs to be done to generate growth and employment in local centres?

We're interested in exploring how local centres are faring at the moment: are they thriving or struggling in the current economic climate. How many empty shops are there and what's causing this? This inquiry will examine how local centres can attract visitors from outside the immediate vicinity. We will also consider the role of the City Council in this but also how others can get involved in supporting their local centre. The current policy will be looked at – how it supports local centres on an individual basis and across the city.

Over the next three weeks we are inviting people and organisations from across the city to send us their views on local centres. We have put together a number of questions, or 'key lines of enquiry' that we will be discussing at a public meeting in October.

These include:

- How are our local centres faring in the current economic climate?
- What differences have the City Council's policy made to local centres? How successful is the over-arching strategy?
- How is the City Council's policy on local centres likely to be affected by changes in the planning regime (including the forthcoming adoption of the Birmingham Development Plan)?
- What is the impact of the following on the economic potential of local centres and how are these being addressed:
 - Design of local centres;
 - Transport links;
 - Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour;
- What should the role of the City Council be in supporting local centres, given current and future financial constraints?

An Inquiry is only as good as the evidence it receives. We would welcome a written statement of your views and experience on any of the above points, along with any other comments or ideas you might have. We will collect all the written submissions and use these as evidence to support our work.

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We hope that you will use this opportunity to get involved in what we believe will be an influential piece of work.

If you would like any further information about this Scrutiny Inquiry or how to submit written evidence, please email scrutiny@birmingham.gov.uk or call 0121 303 1668.

The deadline for written submissions is the **2nd November 2012**.